

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY DACCA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5406

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

S E C R E T DACCA 0177

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PK, BG

SUBJ: PAKISTAN-BANGLADESH RELATIONS

REF: STATE 267372; ISLAMABAD 11550

1. SUMMARY: FOREIGN MINISTER KAMAL HOSSAIN, EVIDENTLY DESIROUS OF REVIVING THE DIALOGUE ON ITS RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN, WANTS THE SECRETARY TO KNOW THAT BANGLADESH'S POSITION IS NOT AS RIGID AS BHUTTO ALLEGEDLY HAS BEEN PORTRAYING IT, AND HOPES THE SECRETARY WILL MAKE THIS POINT TO BHUTTO WHEN HE COMES TO WASHINGTON. FOMIN STILL HOPES FOR A MEETING BETWEEN PAKISTANI AND BANGLADESH REPRESENTATIVES, WHICH HE WOULD SEE IDEALLY AT THE LEVEL OF FOREIGN SECRETARIES. END SUMMARY.

2. I HAD STAYED BEHIND FOR A MOMENT AFTER CONGRESSMAN PASSMAN'S VISIT WITH FOMIN LAST FRIDAY TO TELL HIM OF OUR CONTRIBUTION OF \$50,000 TO UNHCR TO HELP REPATRIATION FROM BANGLADESH AND NEPAL TO PAKISTAN. FOMIN EXPRESSED PLEASURE AT THIS NEWS, COMMENTED THAT HE HAD READ THAT BHUTTO WOULD BE VISITING WASHINGTON IN FEBRUARY, AND SAID HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE ME BEFORE I WENT ON VACATION. ACCORDINGLY I CALLED ON HIM YESTERDAY (JAN 9), ACCOMPANIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR.

3. REFERRING TO THE PROSPECTIVE BHUTTO VISIT, FOMIN SAID BDG WAS STILL DEEPLY INTERESTED IN ACHIEVING NORMALIZATION WITH PAKISTAN AND NOTED THE SECRETARY'S HELPFUL EFFORTS IN THIS CONNECTION

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DURING HIS RECENT VISITS TO DACCA AND ISLAMABAD. I TOLD HIM THAT

AMBASSADOR BYROADE HAD CONVEYED REPORT OF OUR LAST CONVERSATION ON THIS SUBJECT TO FOMIN AGHA SHAHI, WHO WAS TO HAVE INFORMED BHUTTO. I NOTED THAT MATTERS APPEARED TO BE AT A STANDOFF AND THAT, WHILE WE REMAINED READY TO BE HELPFUL IF EITHER SIDE ASKED OUR ASSISTANCE, WE DID NOT SEE MUCH SCOPE FOR A FURTHER INITIATIVE AT THIS TIME.

4. FOMIN SAID HE BELIEVED IT WAS IMPORTANT TO HAVE A DIALOGUE WITH PAKISTAN. HE SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN CONCERNED AT ONE OR TWO RECENT PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY BHUTTO WHICH HAD CHARACTERIZED THE BANGLADESH POSITION AS "RIGID". IT WAS NOT FAIR TO DESCRIBE BDG ATTITUDE IN THIS WAY, AND SUCH PUBLIC STATEMENTS WERE NOT HELPFUL. BDG WAS WILLING TO TALK OUT THE PROBLEM, AND ITS STAND ON THE ISSUE OF THE DIVISION OF ASSETS WAS FLEXIBLE. THE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND PAKISTAN, HE SAID, WAS IN THE INTEREST OF BOTH COUNTRIES, AND OF SOUTH ASIA AS A WHOLE. BANGLADESH WAS ANXIOUS TO DEAL CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH THE PROBLEM AND BELIEVED THAT DISCUSSION--IN PRIVATE, NOT IN PUBLIC--WAS BEST. THE BDG STILL BELIEVED THAT A MEETING BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH AT AN APPROPRIATE LEVEL WOULD BE THE WAY TO BEGIN. HE SAID HE WANTED THE SECRETARY TO KNOW THAT THE BDG'S POSITION WAS NOT RIGID, AND HOPED THAT HE WOULD SPEAK TO BHUTTO ABOUT THIS DURING THE LATTER'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON.

5. I SAID I WOULD CONVEY WHAT HE HAD SAID TO THE SECRETARY. I ASKED IF HE HAD HIS OWN THOUGHTS ABOUT THE LEVEL OF THE MEETING HE HAD REFERRED TO. HE SAID HE THOUGHT IT MIGHT WELL BE AT THE LEVEL OF FOREIGN SECRETARY, BUT THEY WERE FLEXIBLE ON THIS POINT. THE MEETING COULD ALSO BE HELD IN DACCA OR ISLAMABAD--THEY WERE FLEXIBLE ON THIS AS WELL.

6. COMMENT. THE FOMIN'S REMARKS REFLECT AN ELEMENT OF PIQUE AT BHUTTO FOR WHAT HE OBVIOUSLY BELIEVES IS BHUTTO'S UNFAIR REPRESENTATION OF BDG POSITION BUT ALSO A STRONGER ELEMENT OF HOPE THAT THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE TWO CAPITALS CAN BE RESUMED. WHILE THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE TO OUR EYE THAT EITHER SIDE IS READY TO MAKE SERIOUS EFFORT AT COMPROMISE, I HOPE THAT SECRETARY WILL FIND AN OCCASION IN HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH BHUTTO TO SAY THAT BDG HAS BEEN AT PAINS TO EMPHASIZE THAT THEIR POSITION IS NOT AS RIGID AS PAKISTAN APPEARS TO BELIEVE AND THAT THEY HAVE REEMPHASIZED THEIR
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DESIRE FOR A MEETING WHICH THEY WOULD SEE AT FOREIGN SECRETARY LEVEL, BUT ON WHICH THEY ARE FLEXIBLE AS TO VENUE AND PARTICIPANTS.
BOSTER

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